
U.S. Representative

John Spratt

South Carolina # 5th District

News Release

December 13, 2001, For Immediate Release

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House Passes Defense Bill with Base Closing Provision

WASHINGTON – The U.S. House of Representatives today passed a defense authorization bill for fiscal year 2002, which at the insistence of President Bush calls for another base closing round, but postpones the date until 2005.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld pushed hard for base closure, and President Bush threatened to veto the defense bill unless the legislation included it.

“I did not want see another round of base closings come,” said Spratt, “and neither did other House members on the conference committee. But the Bush Administration insisted that another round was overdue and had to be included in this bill if the President was to sign it. The House conferees held out until the end of the conference and were able to win several concessions, most notably a delay until 2005.”

Spratt said despite the base closure provision, the House had to pass the defense bill. “In addition to providing nearly \$6 million for a new education center at Shaw Air Force Base, the bill contains numerous provisions critical to national security, including a significant pay raise.”

The \$343.3 billion defense bill includes a targeted pay raise for armed forces personnel, providing a pay raise of at least five percent for officers, at least six percent for enlisted service members, and targeted pay raises up to ten percent for some ranks. The bill continues efforts to reduce housing costs, improves travel and transportation benefits to reduce out-of-pocket expenses for service members and their families, authorizes the transfer of some “GI Bill” benefits to dependents, and fully funds the TRICARE military health care system.

Under the legislation, the Secretary of Defense will have to complete a review of the military’s “force structure” and infrastructure needed to support the nation’s military objectives before a base closure round can begin. The analysis must be presented to Congress early in 2004. “Consequently,” said Spratt, “Congress will have a year to examine the study and raise questions and objections.”

Spratt said a year after the study is submitted, in 2005, the Secretary of Defense will submit a list of bases recommended for closure or inactive status. As was the case in four rounds of base closings in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995, an independent commission, known as the “Base Realignment and Closure Commission” (BRAC), will then review the list and submit its

recommendations to Congress. Congress and the President will then have to approve or reject the entire list.

“I am not pleased that the conferees included a base closure round in the defense bill,” said Spratt, “but I am pleased with one important change made to previous BRAC rounds. Under the new procedures, once the Secretary of Defense has compiled his list, it will take a vote of seven of the nine commissioners to add a base to the list. In previous BRACs, a simple majority of the commission could add a base, and that’s too easy. In the next BRAC, it will difficult for the commission to add to the Pentagon’s list.” A simple majority of the commission will still be able to delete bases from the Secretary’s list.

Spratt commended Governor Hodges for setting up a military task force to work on retaining bases in South Carolina. The 22-member panel, headed by Comptroller General Jim Lander, held its first meeting on Tuesday.

Spratt said the Sumter-Shaw Committee, with Major General Tom Olsen’s able assistance, has continued in operation since earlier base closing rounds and has been an invaluable organization in making the case for Shaw. “We will not wait four years,” said Spratt. “We have been working since the last round and we will step up our efforts.”

The defense bill passed by the House also authorizes funds to improve and modernize military equipment; authorizes funds for research and development; enhances antiterrorism, homeland security, and weapons non-proliferation activities; and authorizes \$10.7 billion for military construction and family housing.

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